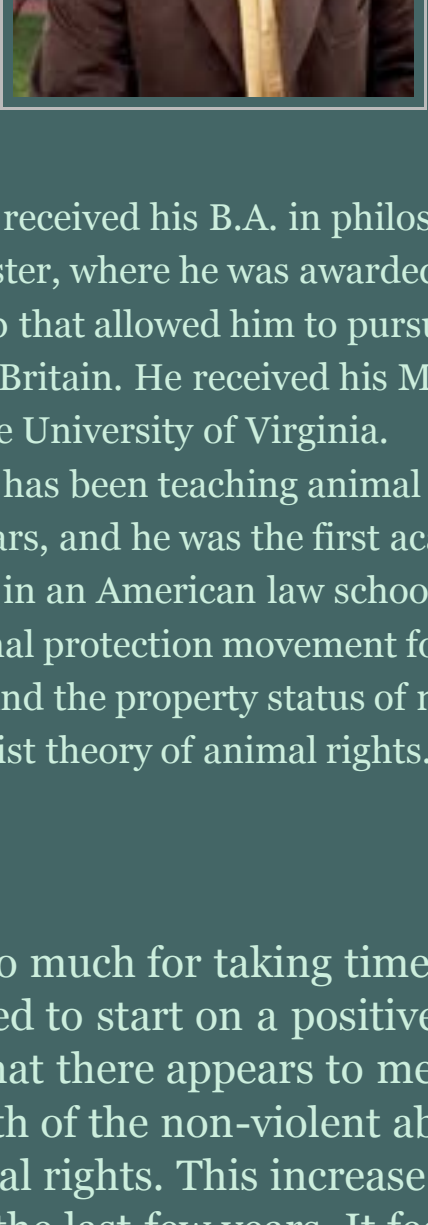


VEGAN SANCTUARY

a bloguide to compassionate living

Interview With Gary L. Francione

Vegan Sanctuary is honored to have Distinguished Professor of Law and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Scholar of Law & Philosophy at Rutgers University, **Gary L. Francione** as our guest.



Professor Francione received his B.A. in philosophy from the University of Rochester, where he was awarded the Phi Beta Kappa O'Hearn Scholarship that allowed him to pursue graduate study in philosophy in Great Britain. He received his M.A. in philosophy and his J.D. from the University of Virginia. Professor Francione has been teaching animal rights and the law for more than 20 years, and he was the first academic to teach animal rights theory in an American law school. He is well known throughout the animal protection movement for his criticism of animal welfare law and the property status of nonhuman animals, and for his abolitionist theory of animal rights.

Phillip:
Gary, thank you so much for taking time to answer a few questions. I wanted to start on a positive note and make the observation that there appears to me to be a huge spurt in the growth of the non-violent abolitionist approach to animal rights. This increase appears to have happened in just the last few years. It feels like a real movement taking shape here again. Am I living in a bubble or being too optimistic?

Gary:
No, I think you're right. In 2006, we set up [Abolitionist Approach.com](#) with the volunteer help of Randy Sandberg and it took off beyond our wildest expectations. I started developing this theory in the early 1990s but after I wrote *Rain Without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* in 1996, most of the large organizations did what they could to keep my work away from animal advocates. The internet has now eviscerated the ability of the animal welfare corporations to control communication and it has also reduced the cost and other impediments to people from all over the world communicating with others. The internet is capable of creating grassroots movements and that is what is occurring here.

Phillip:
Can you briefly explain the concept of the abolitionist approach to animal rights and what it actually means?

Gary:
The abolitionist approach: (1) maintains that we cannot justify animal use, however "humane" it may be; (2) rejects welfare campaigns that seek more "humane" exploitation or single-issue campaigns that seek to portray one form of animal exploitation as morally worse than other forms of animal exploitation (e.g., a campaign that seeks to distinguish fur from wool or leather); (3) regards veganism, or the complete rejection of the consumption or use of any animal products, as a moral baseline; (4) regards creative, nonviolent vegan education as the primary form of activism because the paradigm will not shift until we address demand and educate people to stop thinking of animals as things we eat, wear, or use as our resources. The animals covered by the abolitionist approach are all sentient beings; all beings who are subjectively aware. An animal does not have to have human like characteristics, such as human like intelligence, rationality, etc. to be a full member of the moral community.

Phillip:
Vegan Sanctuary is the blog for Animal Acres which is a farmed animal sanctuary just north of Los Angeles. The animals all living here now were once existing as exploited disposable beings all destined for the slaughterhouse. They have all been rescued and given a new life and permanent home. One of the themes of this blog is that when we live vegan we function on a personal level akin to an animal sanctuary. Yet veganism can also be the most effective single form of political activism we can take for animals as well. In your opinion is living vegan as political as it is personal?

Gary:
Absolutely. I regard veganism as the application of the abolitionist principle to one's own life. It is a rejection of the socio-legal concept of animals as things or as property. Veganism is a necessary step for anyone who says she takes nonviolence seriously.

Phillip:
Can you talk a bit about the concept of Ahimsa and how it relates to animal rights?

Gary:
That's a terrific question and I am glad that you asked it. Ahimsa is the principle of non-violence. It appears explicitly in several Eastern spiritual traditions, most prominently in Jainism. I believe that one of Christ's primary goals was to bring the concept into Western thinking. In any event, I view the problem of animal exploitation as one involving violence. Violence is not going to be part of the solution. We need to shift the paradigm and have a revolution of the heart. If we are ever going to eliminate animal exploitation, we are not going to do so with hate and violence. We are going to do so with peace and love.

I am bewildered by people who advocate violence. If you destroy five slaughterhouses and the demand for meat remains the same, the demand will be met and new slaughterhouses will be built (or existing ones expanded). If you shut down a company that supplies animals used in vivisection but the demand for animals remains the same, someone else will supply those animals.

The pro-violence position characterizes the institutional user as the "exploiter," the "enemy." In reality, it is we—the people who demand and consume animals—who are the real "exploiters." We have got to change ourselves before anything is going to change for animals.

I should say that a number of these pro-violence people are not even vegans. So they're involved directly in exploitation but they think that they are morally justified in urging violence against others? That's sheer hypocrisy.

Phillip:
I've met a lot of caring and sincere people who voted for Proposition 2 here in California and what I noticed was that almost none of them were actually thinking this whole thing through in any critical way. There's a great deal of evidence that regulating or attempting to legislate the treatment of nonhuman animals doesn't work and actually makes the situation for them much worse. Can you discuss how an abolitionist approach would deal with a Proposition 2-type campaign and what would be the most effective path to take for farmed animals?

Gary:
I think Proposition 2 is a disaster. First of all, it is not even effective until 2015. Second, some of the practices that it purports to ban do not even occur in California or are on their way out anyway. Third, Proposition 2 is riddled with exceptions. Fourth, even if by some miracle Proposition 2 actually comes into effect in 2015, all that is going to happen is that hens will go from a from a conventional cage into one large cage called a "cage-free" barn. Let's be clear: the hens are going to continue to be tortured. That torture is just going to have the stamp of approval of the Humane Society of the United States and the other welfarist groups that supported Proposition 2. Fifth, to the extent that this causes any rise in egg prices, conventional battery eggs will just be imported into California from Mexico or from Oregon or Arizona. Sixth, all that Proposition 2 does—and I mean all—is to make humans feel better about exploiting animals. Proposition 2 has nothing to do with animals. It has to do with making humans feel better.

Animal advocates need to think a bit more critically. You're quite right to say that the history of animal welfare is the history of miserable failure. But the large, wealthy national groups ignore this in favor of pursuing campaigns for welfare reform. Why? There are two primary reasons. First, large groups need a steady stream of fundraising vehicles and welfare campaigns are perfect for that purpose. These campaigns usually target practices that are economically vulnerable in the first place. That is, the large groups identify practices that are not economically efficient and that are being questioned within the industry. Although industry will put up a token fight and there is a choreographed "conflict" between industry and welfarists. The welfarists prevail and praise industry. Industry wins; welfarists win; animals lose. Second, welfare campaigns do not require that anyone really change themselves. You can be a "conscientious omnivore" and support these campaigns.

An abolitionist would not support Proposition 2-type campaigns. They are worse than doing nothing; they actually do greater harm by feeding this "happy" meat/animal products nonsense. Again, if anything is ever going to change, we need to get people to realize that we should not be consuming any animal products. We should be engaged in creative, nonviolent vegan education.

If all of the money—the millions and millions of dollars—that go into these welfare campaigns were, instead, put into a clear, unequivocal, creative campaign for veganism, we'd have many more vegans than we have today. That would make a difference and it would only snowball and grow. That would be meaningful change. That would start and develop the paradigm shift that we need to have meaningful change.

Phillip:
What is the best way for an animal rights advocate to effectively express to others that attempting to merely reduce animals suffering will in the long run hurt the cause of animal rights and veganism?

Gary:
Advocates need first to educate themselves about this and many other matters. Most animal advocates do not read or study anything. That is why these large organizations can talk them into supporting nonsense like Proposition 2. I have been writing about the failure of animal welfare for over 20 years now. I have written books and articles; I have written blog essays and done podcasts. And yet, I frequently get emails from animal advocates asking me why I think animal welfare fails.

If you want to be an effective animal advocate and educate others, you have first to educate yourself. I suggest that advocates who want to understand the abolitionist approach visit our site <http://www.AbolitionistApproach.com>. Look at the teaching videos we have on animal rights theory, rights and these subjects, as property, etc. Listen to the podcasts on these subjects. Read the dozens of blog essays that provide reasoned argument about the failure of welfare.

Phillip:
What about the notion of getting beyond just discussing these issues with activists? I've found that speaking about living vegan to others that are open to the idea of living compassionately is really effective. For instance, in the yoga world so many caring people who have been led down the path to happy meat seem to be more open to the understanding that the so called "humane" methods of farming animals is a myth. Sometimes the non-animal activists who are searching for compassion in their lives can see this point even more clearly than many animal activists. Have you had this experience maybe with your students?

Gary:
Absolutely. Part of the problem is that the organized animal movement has become something of a cult. People are not allowed to question anything without being called "divisive." If you object to welfare reform on the grounds that it is ineffective and counterproductive, you are accused of "not caring" about animals. Many "animal people" need de-programming in my view.

I find that non-animal people are much more receptive to the approach that I present. I make arguments. I give reasons. People can examine my premises and make their own assessment about whether my conclusions flow from those premises. I think that my position stands up to the tests of reason. And I think that it resonates with the non-violent orientation that many people have.

In any event, I get much more positive responses from students and members of the general public. Many "animal people" are, unfortunately, lost causes.

Phillip:
When you wrote your 2007 essay [We're All Michael Vick](#), which was published in the Philadelphia Daily News (and is available on your website), it seemed to really spark a debate about what being vegan really means and talking seriously what happens to animals. Can you talk a bit on this idea and what you were attempting to convey in your article?

Gary:
I was motivated to write the essay in part because I thought that the coverage of Michael Vick was somewhat like the coverage of O.J. Simpson. I thought it was driven by racism, at least in part.

But what really grabbed me was that everyone was so very upset with Vick for what we all do: exploit, torture, and kill animals because we get pleasure from animal use. There really is no difference between Vick sitting around a pit watching dogs fight and the rest of us, sitting around the summer barbecue pit roasting their bodies.

The article got an incredible response. I received about 1200 emails in a week! Although many people were irrationally upset for comparing meat eaters to dog fighters, many people said the makes sense: "You know, I never looked at that. It makes sense and I am troubled."

The most important step in the struggle against animal exploitation is to get people to see things differently. The Michael Vick essay got many people to do just that.

Phillip:
So many animal activists view animal rights as a one-way street. They say "I only care about animals. I don't care at all about any other political or any other rights issues." Yet these same animal activists will also be the first to lash out at gay rights or feminist activists for failing to notice the oppression of non humans. Do you suspect this attitude might be one of the main reasons we no longer have a legitimate animal rights movement anymore?

Gary:
I have for decades now been trying to link human rights and animal rights. In fact, the course that Anna Charlton and I teach at Rutgers University is called "Human Rights and Animal Rights." Speciesism is immoral because it is like racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. We cannot oppose speciesism without opposing these other forms of discrimination. I am not saying that we have to be activists in all movements; no one has that sort of time. But we should at least in our daily lives reject all discrimination. I do not like using that term because I do not really think that any "movement" exists), particularly PETA, uses sexism supposedly to promote animal rights. Apart from the fact that sexism is inherently objectionable, its use makes no sense. The problem we are dealing with is the commodification of non humans; as long as we commodify women, we are going to continue to commodify non humans. So the exploitation of one group supposedly to help another is both morally and strategically problematic.

Phillip:
Do you think adherence to traditional religions creates a kind of blind spot in seeing non humans as living feeling individuals or is it that their faith blocks the notion of animals being a part of the moral community?

Gary:
Sure. Most of the traditional religions regard non humans as spiritual inferiors who are here for our use. It is interesting whether those traditions accurately reflect the views of their founders or central figures. For example, there is historical evidence that Christ was an Essene and Essenes did not consume animal products. In any event, Christ promoted peace and nonviolence and he is used to justify wars. So the use of religions doctrines to justify animal exploitation is traditional, but so is the misuse of religion.

Phillip:
I see similarities in how animal advocates believe that single issue campaigns, better treatment campaigns, or using violence in animal rights campaigns are somehow going to work. Are there similarities and, if so, what accounts for them?

Gary:
Yes, there are those certainly similarities. There is a similarity between those who promote welfare reform and those who promote violence. Both groups focus on institutional users rather than trying to educate the public so that moral thinking changes and demand for animal products is decreased. Both groups characterize the institutional users as the "exploiters." The real exploiters are all of us who continue to consume animal products and thereby create the demand. There is a similarity between those who promote welfare reform and those who pursue single-issue campaigns (e.g., anti-fur campaigns) because both groups seek to characterize certain forms of exploitation as morally different from other forms. There is no morally significant difference between a conventional egg and a cage-free egg; there is no morally significant distinction between flesh and other animal products; there is no morally significant distinction between fur and wool.

Phillip: Any final thoughts?

Gary:
Yes, I want to reiterate what I said earlier. The key to meaningful change is creative, nonviolent education. And to educate others, you must first educate yourself. Those who care about this issue need to learn the basics of animal rights theory to explain why we cannot justify animal use, however "humane," and must understand the simple economics of animal exploitation to explain why welfare reform cannot work. Again, I invite those interested to visit our website. It's a good place to start learning.

Phillip: Thank you Gary for sharing your ideas here. It's much appreciated.

Gary L. Francione is Distinguished Professor of Law and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach Scholar of Law and Philosophy at Rutgers University School of Law. His books include *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Exploitation of Animal Use* (2008), *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?* (2000); *Rain Without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement* (1996); and *Animals, Property, and the Law* (1995). His forthcoming book, *The Animal Rights Debate: Abolition vs. Regulation*, will be published in March 2010 by Columbia University Press. He has a website at www.AbolitionistApproach.com.

This little piggy's gonna be BIG! Meet the hot new star here first from the upcoming film BOLD NATIVE.

Philip with Animal Acres superstar recording artist Bully Idol from their new CD "Dancing With Moo Self".

3 comments:

Anonymous said...
I was recently attacked verbally by a well known animal rights person because I admitted I wished I had not voted yes for Prop 2. I told them I thought it was a scam and I felt bad for the animals. They lashed out at me in an oppressive manner which I could not believe. It was very harsh and surprising. I wish I had seen this professors work before hand.
Many others like me were duped into this vote. But I think more people are realizing how bad the intentions were now.
January 7, 2010 12:41 PM

Sara said...
What if a vegan, someone, wanted to put their efforts into fighting the Canadian seal hunt? Would that be considered impractical or a single issue campaign according to an abolitionist viewpoint?
January 8, 2010 2:27 PM

Dana said...
Great interview with good points made.
In my mind though Prop 2 got a lot of attention for farm animals. I think it was not a disaster but a great education opportunity for people to wake up to where their meat comes